

Finding Calm: 4-Square Breathing & Applied Muscle Relaxation

Feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or stressed? These simple techniques can help you regain control and find a sense of calm.

1. 4-Square Breathing (Box Breathing):

This technique helps regulate your breathing, slowing your heart rate and calming your nervous system.

How to do it:

- Find a comfortable position: Sit or lie down in a relaxed posture.
- Visualise a square: Imagine a square in front of you. Each side represents a phase of the breath.
- Inhale (4 seconds): Slowly inhale through your nose while tracing the first side of the square in your mind. Count to four.
- Hold (4 seconds): Hold your breath for four seconds, tracing the second side of the square.
- Exhale (4 seconds): Slowly exhale through your mouth for four seconds, tracing the third side of the square.
- Hold (4 seconds): Hold your breath out for four seconds, tracing the final side of the square.
- Repeat: Continue this cycle for several minutes, or until you feel calmer.

Tips:

- Focus on the numbers and the visualisation of the square to help you stay present.
- If four seconds is too long, start with shorter intervals (e.g., 3 seconds) and gradually increase.
- Practice regularly to make it more effective.

2. Applied Muscle Relaxation (AMR):

AMR helps release physical tension, which often accompanies anxiety and stress.

How to do it:

- Find a quiet place: Sit or lie down comfortably.
- Start with your feet: Focus on the muscles in your feet.
- Tense: Gently tense the muscles in your feet for 5-10 seconds. You should feel the tension, but not pain.
- Relax: Release the tension suddenly and completely. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation.
- Move upwards: Repeat this process for each muscle group, moving up your body:
 - Calves
 - Thighs

- Buttocks
- Stomach
- Chest
- Hands
- Arms
- Shoulders
- Neck
- Face (forehead, jaw, etc.)
- Focus on the feeling: Pay close attention to the sensation of relaxation as you release each muscle group.
- Deep breathing: Combine AMR with deep breathing for enhanced relaxation.

Tips:

- Don't tense your muscles too hard.
- Focus on the contrast between tension and relaxation.
- Practice regularly to become more aware of muscle tension and how to release it.
- It is common to not feel a lot on your first few attempts. Keep practicing.

Combining 4-Square Breathing and AMR

These techniques work well together. You can:

- Start with a few minutes of 4-square breathing to calm your mind.
- Then, move on to AMR to release physical tension.
- Finish with a few more minutes of 4-square breathing to solidify your sense of calm.

When to use these techniques:

- When you feel anxious or stressed.
- Before or after a stressful event.
- Before going to sleep.
- Anytime you need to find a moment of peace.

Remember: Practice makes perfect. Be patient with yourself, and these techniques will become more effective over time. If you are experiencing severe anxiety or stress, please consult with a healthcare professional.

